

A
L E T T E R

TO THE

Rev. Mr. *James Chandler,*

Pastor of the West Church

in *Rowley.*

Relative, more especially,

To a Marginal Note or two in his Sermon
preached at *Newbury-Port*, June 25. 1767.
preparatory to the settling of a Minister.

By JOHN TUCKER, A. M.

Pastor of the First Church in NEWBURY.

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To the Rev^d. Mr. *James Chandler*,

Pastor of the West Church in *Rowley*.

Rev.^d Sir.

WHEN your sermon, preached at *Newbury-Port*, June 25. 1767, made its appearance from the press, my leisure hours were taken up with a particular business, that prevented my giving that attention to a certain marginal note, p. 27. which it justly deserved.

What I shall now offer therefore relative to said note, will not, I hope, be looked upon so much out of due time, as, on that account, to be unworthy of your notice. Nor will you, Sir, or others, who compare the contents of your note, with some things I have published, consider me as impertinently and unreasonably intruding myself into the present business: And my addressing you in this public manner, will not, I presume, be thought rude and unbecoming, as it is upon a subject published to the world, and, in my apprehension, of no small importance both to yourself, and to the credit and interest of religion.

My design is not to enter into an intemperate, angry debate with you, but to attend, with calmness to the subject before me; in doing which, though I may speak with some freedom, I shall endeavour to treat you in a manner becoming your station and character, and my own. But, indeed, Sir, had I met with this note any where but among your writings, and without your name, I could not easily have been persuaded it came from you, it is so different from the opinion I had formed of you, as a gentleman of a more candid and generous spirit.

For

For the charge you here bring against some of your brethren, is certainly high, and must appear, either of a very criminal nature on their part, or of a very injurious one on your's; and ought not, I conceive, to have been produced by any one, but with clear and strong evidence for its support:—the evidence you have offered for this purpose I shall examine by and by.

But that I may write the more intelligibly, and the better avoid giving any just occasion for complaint, I shall here remind you, and myself, of the substance of your note, by carefully transcribing the whole of it. You begin it, by alluding, in this manner, to something you had said in your sermon, in favor of confessions of faith; and against such as disapprove of them.

“ The occasion of such a testimony and warning is *this*—Our age produces a generation of men who like not the faith on which the protestant church was founded, and has stood hitherto. Some of them are men of powers, and draw away disciples after them. But they have not been able yet, to obtain a general rejection of the religion of our *fathers*, and the setting up of their own scheme, in the room of it, in these churches. Yea, but few of them dare openly and directly to attempt it; but they are labouring for it *artfully* several ways.

“ One way is—by testifying against creeds, confessions of faith, and every thing of that sort:—pleading that they are set up in competition with, and as of, even more value than, the inspired scriptures. Whereas, they know that the church meaneth not so,—It is the doctrines confessed, and not merely the using of confessions, that their aim is against. There is this evidence of it—They some years ago sent abroad the assembly's catechism, which is in use among us, shear'd and patch'd to make it agreeable to Dr. Taylor's scheme, with a preface recommending the use of catechisms, only adding that they must be according to truth; for which reason they had made the alteration. This catechism, like a wandering star, strangely appeared among us, and as strangely withdrew itself out of our sight. “ Another

* Another of their artifices to get rid of the doctrines which the church has long thought to be doctrines of the gospel—necessary articles of faith is—to represent them as matters of controversy, and so, of indifference in religion. And if they can find, in these confessions, or in any of the writings of the orthodox, an error or slip, they harp upon that string, as if they had gotten that which invalidates the whole.

“Another device yet, which some of them have against the faith of these churches is—to throw out, at every opportunity, their flouts at our confessions of faith, and at the men who are zealous for orthodoxy: as if they meant to banter christians out of their religion. By these things they deceive unstable souls. And if we are always silent, they will grow bolder still, and be like to give religion the greater wound.

“That man is to be honored, who appears to have a spirit of piety himself, and to aim at the promotion of it in others, though his creed differs from established forms. But in some cases the church needs warning—to be on their guard.”

This, Sir, is your note; and that it is levelled against some of your brethren in the ministry, I suppose, no one can doubt.

I shall now consider first the charge, or accusation you here advance against your brethren, and then examine the evidence you offer in support of it; in order to see whether it is sufficient to justify you herein. But previous to my entering upon these points, I would just take notice of a passage or two in your sermon, contiguous to this note;—for I intend not a general examination of your discourse.

Towards the bottom of p. 26. and at the top of p. 27; in giving advice to your hearers how to chuse a minister, you say to them—“You will therefore look that the man be also *sound in the faith*. By soundness in the faith, I mean gospel-doctrine—*The truth as it is in Jesus*. And I may add—Agreeableness in the main,
with

with the confessions of faith of protestant churches—those of them which are generally known among us. For that these confessions are, *mainly*, and with some exceptions, forms of sound words, agreeing with the sacred scriptures, the most pious and learned divines of many ages have sufficiently proved: and you will have reason to refuse a candidate that laughs at them.” Immediately upon which you add, “But the scripture is the test to try all doctrines by,” &c. And by this last sentence, Sir, “but the scripture is the test to try all doctrines by,” it appears to me, you have intirely overthrown, and rendered null and void, all you had said before in favor of confessions of faith. For if the scripture is the test to try all doctrines by, are not the doctrines in these confessions of faith to be tried and judged of by this rule? And if so, are these confessions of faith to be received for truth, and to be conformed to, either by a candidate for the ministry, or by any body else, any farther than they appear to them agreeable to scripture? For who is to try doctrines by this test? Is it only this, or that particular man? Or only a particular number of men?

You say, indeed, “That these confessions are, *mainly*, and with some exceptions, forms of sound words, agreeing with the sacred scriptures, the most pious and learned divines of many ages have sufficiently proved.”—And so, it seems, the point is settled forever.

But permit me to ask, Sir,—Had these pious and learned divines any peculiar privilege and authority to see, and determine, and settle points of faith for the rest of the world? As every man must believe for himself, must not every man see and understand for himself; and consequently must not every man examine and try doctrines, in order to judge of their truth?

And what have these distinguished divines proved? Have they proved that these confessions are in the whole agreeable to scripture? or that they are so only in the *main*, i. e. in part? If they have proved the former, have

have *you*, Sir, or any body else, a right to make exceptions? If they have proved only the latter, should not they, or you have declared what particular articles are to be excepted; that we might know how far these confessions are to be received with an implicit faith; and how far it might be lawful and safe, to try and judge of them by scripture?

You here bring to my mind father Paul's account of one *Richard*, a franciscan friar, who was a member of the renowned council of *Trent*. He asserted, and his opinion was embraced by others of the council, "that the doctrines of faith were now so cleared, that we ought no more to learn them out of scripture:—at least, the studying of it (i. e. scripture) ought to be prohibited to every one, that is not first confirmed in school divinity. Neither (said he) do the Lutherans gain upon any, but those that study the scripture." *

But are not the sacred scriptures to be, as much, a rule to us, as they were to those who have gone before us? And are not we as really to see and judge for ourselves, as they? If so, every man, I conceive, is still to determine for himself, how far any confession is right, and to be received by him for truth; and is to make such exceptions as he thinks proper. And then, of what importance, Sir, are any of these confessions, as standards of truth? To speak of them, or represent them in this light; and to say, at the same time, that the scripture is the test to try all doctrines by, appears to me, I confess, to be making a perfect play-thing of them;—tossing them up with one hand, and striking them down with the other: And if a candidate, or any body else, should laugh at them in this view, I should think he ought not to be blamed for it, nor to be refused at all the more for this, by any sensible and judicious people.

But I shall now proceed, Sir, to consider the charge, or accusation you bring against some of your brethren: And this is mainly contained in the two first paragraphs of

* Paul's Hist. Coun. Trent, p. 149.

of your note, which are thus : " Our age produces a generation of men who like not the faith on which the protestant church was founded, and has stood hitherto. — But they have not been able yet, to obtain a general rejection of the religion of our *fathers*, and the setting up of their own scheme, in the room of it in these churches : yea, but few of them dare openly and directly to attempt it, but they are labouring for it *artfully* several ways."

There appears to me, Sir, some confusion in your language here, unless we understand you as supposing, that the faith, on which the protestant church was founded, and the religion of our *fathers*, were one and the same thing. As this seems most likely to be your meaning, I will charitably understand you in this manner, without criticising upon your expressions : or, to put the case in the most favourable light possible, that your meaning is,—The faith on which the protestant church was founded, was the faith of our fathers ; and upon this faith their religion was built : so that they who like not the faith which was peculiarly the basis of the protestant church, like not the religion of our fathers ; and they who endeavour to reject the former, do, by this, endeavour to reject the latter.

Supposing this, or something much like it, to be your meaning, the accusation you here bring against a number of your brethren, is to this purpose ;—that disliking the faith on which the protestant church was founded, and has hitherto stood, and the religion of our fathers, they are artfully endeavouring a rejection of these, and to introduce, in the room thereof, a scheme of their own.

You must suffer me now, Sir, to ask you,—what was the faith on which the protestant church was founded ? For, that we know this, seems necessary, in order to understand the nature and magnitude of your brethrens crime, and to see your justice in thus accusing them. But I really fear you are here acting an unfair part, and endeavouring to impose upon your less knowing and intelligent

telligent readers. For was not the faith on which the protestant church was founded, this?—Were not the principles, upon which the first reformers from popery distinguished themselves, and established their system of religion, such as these?—That the word of God, contained in the books of the old and new testament, is a full and perfect rule of faith and practice:—That every man has a right to understand, and judge of the sense of these sacred writings for himself:—And therefore, that in matters of religion, he is obliged to submit to no human authority;—is bound by no decrees or determinations of popes, councils &c.

This, as I understand, i. e. the belief of these doctrines, and receiving them as just and right principles, was the faith on which the protestant church was founded;—upon which it has stood hitherto; and I may add, upon which *alone* it can stand, or our seperation from the church of Rome be vindicated. For, if these principles are to be given up;—if we are not to see, and understand and judge for ourselves:—If we ought to submit to human authorities, in matters of faith, our fathers certainly did wrong in breaking off from the church of Rome, and thereby rejecting the degrees and determinations of those who were esteemed pious and learned men, and introducing a scheme of their own in the room thereof; and we their children, as having been brought up, and hitherto lived in their errors, ought penitently to return to the bosom of the Romish church.

As to our fathers, or the first reformers renouncing the doctrines of purgatory, transubstantiation, praying to departed saints, &c. all your protestant brethren, I presume, renounce these, as much as you do. And as to the doctrines of original sin,—particular, absolute election, &c. which, perhaps, you had in your eye, upon these the protestant church was not founded, any more than the roman catholick church. These are doctrines, the faith of which is common to both: The papists believe them, as well as protestants, and perhaps, in as many senses as protestants do.

Was it just then, Sir ; was it not highly injurious in you, towards your brethren, to charge them with disliking, and endeavouring a rejection of the faith on which the protestant church was founded, and of the religion of our fathers ?—Is it not, at least, probable, that they whom you here point out, and brand in this manner, like this faith much better than you do, and would abhor the thought of rejecting the religion of our fathers, so far as it was built upon this bottom, or on any bottom agreeable to the holy scriptures.

And what must we understand by your saying—"Our age produces a generation of men, who like not the faith," &c ? If you means by this, that some of your brethren in the ministry dislike the faith on which the protestant church was really founded, I have no doubt but that your assertion, as here applied, is, though I hope not designedly, yet directly and absolutely false.—And if you mean by this, that they do not like and believe the doctrines of original sin, election, &c. in the high and rigid sense of some, even then your assertion is not true. For has no age but ours produced such men ? Have they, just now, sprung up like so many mushrooms ? I cannot help fearing, Sir, that by these expressions, you intended to convey ideas to your readers, which you had not in your own mind, or which you knew to be false. For surely you cannot be so unacquainted with ecclesiastical history ; and particularly with the history of the reformation, and of the protestant church since that time, as not to know, there have been such men in every age ; and men of great and distinguished characters. Such men are not new and unheard of till this age. They lived before as well as since the protestant æra, even in the days of the apostles ; and will be found, I doubt not, so long as Christ shall have a true church upon the earth. But the novelty of things, sometimes tends to discredit them : and men may be strongly tempted to speak of things they dislike, as *new*, in order to rob them of that respect and honor they deserve.

But

But I proceed now, Sir, to examine the evidence you have offered to support your charge against some of your brethren, viz. that they dislike, and endeavour a rejection of the faith on which the protestant church was founded, and of the religion of our fathers, &c. And your language here is of this purport;—that though few of them dare openly and directly to attempt this, yet they are labouring for it *artfully* several ways.

But do you know, Sir, even of a few such? do you know of any one, who openly attempts this? Is there among Protestants such an enemy to their distinguishing faith, as one who pleads against the divine authority of scripture?—Against the right of private judgment; and who would set up human authorities—creeds and confessions, as standards of truth? Let the base and ungenerous betrayer of the protestant faith, be produced to public view, that he may meet with that reproach and scorn which he justly deserves, and then withdraw himself to those regions of spiritual tyranny, and slavish submission, to which he properly belongs.

You say “they artfully endeavour a rejection of the faith, &c.—(first) by testifying against creeds, confessions of faith, and every thing of that sort,” &c. This, Sir, is, I think, the oddest kind of argument, to prove the point aimed at, that ever I met with. Had you brought it to prove, that they liked, and were endeavouring to establish the faith on which the protestant church was founded, it would, I conceive, have been directly to your purpose. But to mention their testifying against creeds and confessions, as an evidence, that they would overthrow the faith on which the protestant church was founded, i. e. that they would set aside the scripture as the standard or test by which all doctrines are to be tried, and would set up creeds and confessions in the room thereof;—this is very odd indeed.

But they endeavour a rejection of this faith, &c. by testifying against creeds and confessions:—“pleading (you say) that they are set up in competition with, and

as of, even more value than, the inspired scriptures." Now, supposing they testify against creeds and confessions, only in this view of them, I presume, you will allow that this is no fault. And this, I believe, is the only light in which they are testified against by any of your brethren. But, say you, "they know the church meaneth not so." Meaneth, not how, Sir? If these creeds and confessions are improved by the church, or by any body else, as standards of truth;—If explicit consent, or conformity to them, in sentiment, be required of any, in order to their being allowed to be right in their religious opinions, are they not then, set up in competition with, or as of, even more value than, the inspired scriptures? For, if the scriptures are still allowed to be superior to these;—if the doctrines contained in these creeds and confessions, are to be examined and judged of by scripture;—if every one is allowed to receive or reject them, as they appear, to him, to agree, or disagree with the word of God,—this is manifestly reducing them to nothing again, as standards of truth; and there is no occasion for any body to testify against them.

You say, "the church meaneth not so." Pray, Sir, may I ask you, what, or who you mean here by the church?—for this is a word of very general use, and pretty uncertain meaning. By it, a Papist means the church of Rome:—An Episcopalian among Protestants, means by it, the church of England: And among Dissenters, or non-conformists, it has different meanings, by men of different persuasions and denominations. I am confident, indeed, you would not be understood to mean by it the church of Rome. But then, do you mean the protestant church in general? Some parts of this acknowledge no creed or confession, but the bible, and testify against all others: And different parts of the protestant church have confessions of faith, diverse from one another; and, in some particular articles, inconsistent with each other. Do you mean, by the church, all the churches

in this land? Even all of these do not acknowledge any confession of faith, but the bible. Or, do you mean only those churches, or particular christians, who think and believe just as you do? Certainly, Sir, you will not say this:—you will allow some to be of the church of Christ, who do not think exactly with yourself. But let who, or what will, be intended by the church, you say, it meaneth not to set up creeds and confessions in competition with, or as of, even more value than, the inspired scriptures. But if it meaneth not this, will you be so good, Sir, as to say what it doth mean, by the use of these things:—For, if you can exactly declare this, it would I believe, go a great way towards settling the dispute about them.

You go on and say——“ It is the doctrines confessed, and not merely the using confessions that their aim is against.” But this I conceive, Sir, is, at least, very unwarily asserted. For, are there any of your brethren, who are against all the doctrines;—or against the doctrines in general, in these confessions? Your manner of expression plainly admits of such a meaning. But is this true? Would you, upon reflection, venture to assert it? And if not, you will grant, I hope, that it is, at least, probable, their aim may be, rather against using confessions, i. e. as standards of truth, than against the doctrines, in general, contained, or confessed in such writings.

If your meaning is, that they are against only some particular articles in these confessions, it would certainly have been just in you, to have pointed these particular articles out, and not to have thus rashly accused them beyond their desert. And that this was your meaning, seems probable, from what you offer immediately, as proof that they are against the doctrines confessed.—“ There is (say you) this evidence of it. They some years ago sent abroad the assembly’s catechism, which is in use among us, shear’d and patch’d, to make it agreeable to Dr. Taylor’s scheme,” &c. Did they shear it all away, Sir? or did they patch it ’till the original was quite

quite obscured and lost, and it became intirely another thing? If not, they might still allow it to be well enough in some points; perhaps well enough in the *main*; and their aim might be only against some particular things contained in it; and not against the whole; and it was then very unjust in you, to accuse them in this general form.

You yourself, Sir, allow, there are some things in this sort of writings, exceptionable: And, I suppose, you would be willing, either to shear off these, or to patch and mend them more to your mind. And have they done any thing more? Perhaps, indeed, they have not *shear'd* and *patch'd*, just in in the manner you would have done,—for all workmen do not operate exactly alike; but had they not the same right to judge for themselves, in that matter, that you have? And would you condemn them for an action, you would be willing to do yourself?

I remember to have seen this new catechism, as it was called by some, but do not particularly remember how far it was altered from the old one; nor do I know whether the alterations were designed to make it agreeable to Dr. Taylor's scheme. But our enquiry, respecting such kind of writings, ought to be, I apprehend, not whether they are agreeable to Dr. Taylor's scheme, or to Mr. Chandler's scheme; or to the scheme of any other uninspired writer, but whether they are agreeable to the word of God.

You proceed, in your next section, thus—"Another of their artifices to get rid of the doctrines which the church has long thought to be doctrines of the gospel—necessary articles of faith is—to represent them as matters of controversy, and so, of indifference in religion."—Here again you use the word *church*, in what, I conceive, must be a very ambiguous and indeterminate sense. The whole protestant church, Sir, i. e. all its members, do not believe alike concerning all doctrines:—Some receive, as doctrines of the gospel, and necessary articles of faith, what others do not. Which part, and who

who are the church? What are the peculiar opinions which are distinguishingly characteristick of this body? And what doctrines have these men represented as "matters of controversy, and so, of indifference in religion"? Have they represented in this light, all the doctrines owned by the church in any of her confessions? If not; the charge here is highly unjust. If they have represented only some particular doctrines in this light, are they certainly to be blamed for this? Are not some of these, really matters of controversy? Are not those so, at least, which you allow to be exceptionable?

You go on. "And if they can find in these confessions, or in any of the writings of the orthodox, an error or slip, they harp upon that string, as if they had gotten that which invalidates the whole." May I likewise ask you here, Sir, who you mean by the orthodox? Whether only those who think and believe exactly with yourself; or whether you allow others to be so, who endeavour to make the scripture the rule and measure of their sentiments, though, in some things, they may differ from you? You seem to make use of the words *orthodox*, and *orthodoxy*, just as you do of the word *church*, as if you supposed every body would understand, at once, what you meant thereby: whereas these are words of a very vague uncertain meaning, and need to be defined when we would speak with any exactness, which, I conceive, we always ought to do in matters of criminal complaint and accusation. I should chuse to define the words *orthodox*, *orthodoxy*, *orthodox men*, &c. in this manner, but fear I should not have your full and hearty approbation. Orthodoxy, is right opinion or sentiment, in religious matters. Opinions are right, so far as agreeable to sacred scripture. Men are to be esteemed orthodox therefore, not from their opinions being agreeable to any confessions of faith, as such; but from their being agreeable to the word of God: and he is the most orthodox man, whose opinions are most clearly taught, and most evidently supported by sacred scripture.

But

But, to proceed. You say—"If they can find an error or slip, in these confessions, or in any of the writings of the orthodox, they harp upon that string, as if they had gotten that which invalidates the whole." The whole of what? Why, of these confessions and writings. But this, I presume, Sir, cannot be true. No instance can be produced of one of your brethren, who imagines this invalidates the whole of such confessions or writings; or, that would have this thought, by others, to do so.

You, yourself, it seems, have found such errors and slips in some confessions; and you harp upon that string, i. e. venture to mention these, as exceptions. But would you think it fair treatment, if, from hence, I should insinuate, that you imagined, or would have it thought by others, you had gotten that which invalidates the whole of such confessions? If you were not angry at this, would you not despise such meanness? You must not think hard of it then, if a number of such things in your note are, at least, despised by some of your brethren.

In your next paragraph you speak thus. "Another device yet which some of them have against the faith of these churches is—to throw out, at every opportunity, their flouts at our confessions of faith, and at the men who are zealous for orthodoxy: as if they meant to banter christians out of their religion." It must be uncertain here, Sir, who you mean by *these churches*;—whether the protestant church in general: or the churches, in general, in this land, under their several denominations; or only some particular churches, whom you may look upon right in the faith, as distinguished from others. It must likewise be uncertain who you mean by the men who are zealous for orthodoxy; whether they who are zealous for some particular things in religion, which are matters of controversy; or they who are zealous for those great and important things, which are most clearly and indisputably taught in the word of God. But be these things as they may; I presume, the representation

sentation you here give of some of your brethren, is without any just foundation;—that your assertions respecting them cannot be true; and are of a very injurious nature. For what evidence have you, that there are some of your brethren, who are against the faith of any protestant churches? i. e. against the faith of such churches, in the whole?—who dislike, and would condemn every article in their creed? Your general charge, supposes this, or, at least, that they are against the main and chief parts of such faith. But, is this true? And, do they, indeed, Sir, at every opportunity, throw out their flouts at your confessions of faith: and at the men who are zealous for orthodoxy? If you would have it thought, your brethren have no regard to truth and virtue, I am persuaded they have too much respect even to decency and good manners, to do this. Some of them, 'tis true, may venture to speak and write against confessions of faith, as used unlawfully, and to bad purposes, i. e. when they are improved as standards and tests of truth, to the dishonor of the word of God; to the exclusion of the right of private judgment, and to the promotion of contentions and divisions among christians. And they may speak also against the bigotry, and hot, intemperate zeal of some, who would assume to themselves the distinguishing title and character of orthodox men. But is this, Sir, sufficient to support your charge here?

Let it be supposed that you yourself, who are now but an ordinary minister of Christ, should take it into your head to set up for infallibility, and should aspire at the other exorbitant claims of his holiness at Rome;—that you should issue forth your decrees and edicts for new-modelling the christian doctrine and worship, and require your brethren reverently to receive, and conform to such pontifical orders:—And that some should venture to speak against your thus *exalting yourself*; and should endeavour to convince the world you had really no such powers as you challenged; and that your pretending to use them, and others submitting to them, was

unreasonable, and of ill tendency : yea, let it be supposed, that you should be even ridiculed and laughed at, or be treated with contempt and scorn, under such an appearance ;—could it be justly said, you were flouted at as a minister of Christ ? No ; You would be treated in that manner, only so far as you exalted yourself above your proper rank and place, and acted out of character ; and thereby justly merited the ridicule, and contempt of your brethren.

Let confessions of faith, and such kind of writings be kept in their proper place, and be made use of only for their proper ends ; and let men be zealous only for the great and manifest doctrines of holy scripture, and no sober protestant, I believe, will flout at either of these. And, I cannot help thinking, there may be a very material difference, between endeavours to banter men out of true and proper religion, and to banter them out of bigotry, absurdity and nonsense ;—the former would be very criminal, while the latter would justly merit praise.

“ By these things (you say) they deceive unstable souls.” But, I hope not, Sir. You add : “ And if we are always silent, they will grow bolder still, and be like to give religion the greater wound.” So that your speaking, it seems, is to terrify and stop the mouths of these bold and forward men. “ And if we are always silent”—Who, Sir, do you mean by *we* ? Yourself, and some others whom you would stile men zealous for orthodoxy ? And do you really think, that any who have a just concern for truth, and for the honor and interest of the protestant religion, will be intimidated, and struck into profound and perpetual silence, by your speaking against them in the language of this note ? Your insinuation here that these men would *wound religion*, may deserve a severer reflection than I chuse to make use of at present ; and so I pass it over.

But drawing now to the close of your note, you seemingly put on an air of greater candor, as if you meant, in some measure, to make up with your brethren,
for

for the abuses you have offered them. Your language in the last section is thus—"That man is to be honored, who appears to have a spirit of piety himself, and to aim at the promotion of it in others, though his creed differs from established forms." I say, you *seemingly* put on an air of greater candor; for the expression, "that man is to be honored," is of a very uncertain meaning, as here used. By *that man*, I suppose, indeed, you would have understood *that minister, or preacher*,—he is to be honored:—But what honor would you allow him? Shall he, with your leave, be esteemed and treated as a true minister of the gospel? Will you allow him this character and privilege, though his creed differs from, what you may mean by, established forms? I really suspect, this cannot be your sense; because it would, I conceive, be giving up the chief of what you have said before, by founding his right to your charitable opinion, not on the orthodoxy of his creed, but on the apparent piety of his character. So that what *honor* you would allow to such a man, must be left, I believe, for you to determine, in some future time.

You add—"But in some cases the church needs warning to be on their guard." Here, Sir, I think, you should have been so kind and faithful, as to have said, in what particular cases, the church, i. e. any church, I will suppose, "needs warning," &c. for these expressions, as they here stand, appear to me, directly calculated, to encourage and stir up those uncharitable jealousies, suspicions, contentions, and divisions among christians, which are a reproach to their character, and a dishonor to the protestant religion.

But I will trespass no longer on your patience, than just to recommend to your sober and serious thoughts the following queries, viz.—Whether Protestants can act a consistent part, and be likely to live together in peace and love, on any other foundation but this,—That they all acknowledge the sacred scriptures to be the only

perfect rule of faith, and the test, by which all doctrines are to be tried.—That as every man must believe for himself, so every man has a right to see and understand for himself;—to judge of the sense of scripture, and to try all doctrines by that rule:—And therefore, that no man, or body of men, since the days of inspiration, ever had, have now, or can have, any authority to determine and fix the sense of scripture for others, and to require their consent thereto:—In consequence of all which,—that they ought to exercise mutual condescension, forbearance and charity, one towards another, in all those differences of sentiment, which are not plainly essential to the very being of religion, and to a title to future happiness; and which are, perhaps, absolutely unavoidable, in the present state of weakness and imperfection?

Your answer to these questions, with such reply to, or reflections upon, the whole I have offered, as you shall think fit, will be properly received, and attended to, by,

Rev. Sir,

your brother, and

most humble servant,

John Tucker.

Newbury, August 25. 1767.

POSTSCRIPT.

POSTSCRIPT.

Rev.^d Sir,

WHEN I read your sermon at first, with its appendages, I took some particular notice of your marginal note, p. 21. respecting separations, and viewed it in its relation to those passages in the sermon to which it refers. But notwithstanding this part of your performance appeared to me very exceptionable, yet I was ready to hope, your obvious inconsistency with yourself, would prevent its doing any considerable damage. But upon a review, since I finished the foregoing letter, my mind is in some measure altered; and I am much afraid, that, however innocent your intention might be, what you had said, may be productive of very ill effects, unless you can be prevailed with to offer to the world, such explanation of your meaning, as may happily prevent these. The main intention of this Postscript therefore is earnestly to request your doing this: And that I may make you sensible of the propriety and importance hereof, I shall here transcribe some passages of your sermon, with this note, as referring thereto, and offer something briefly upon them. At the bottom of p. 20 and top of p. 22 of your sermon, you address your hearers thus,—

“ Only here observe, that *two cannot walk together except they be agreed*: And so it can't be expected that a society will agree in the choice of a minister, if they are not agreed in the doctrines—in the religion of the gospel. This is therefore what may be properly enquired into—whether they are of *one mind* with respect to religion itself, and the character of the man whom they would have to preach to them the religion of the gospel.

gospel, and if they cannot agree in this, they had better *part asunder*, than pretend to unite in that, in which they are so disunited."

To these passages, in your sermon, your note is annexed in this form. "This is not designed to encourage—to give the least countenance to, the separations which are now so common in this land. The author knows too much of the weakness and wickedness of some of them, to mean any such thing.

"Neither is it meant to suppose, that there is occasion for such a disunion in this church, or to encourage it. But rather it was thought, that the mention of the thing would be so alarming, as to persuade the christians here, to watch against strifes and divisions:—to give up every thing but their consciences—every thing but the truth and cause of the Lord, for the sake of peace and unity.

"Yet when truth—necessary truth—proper means of conversion and edification, are what is contended for, this is too tender a case to be determined by a majority of votes, so as to bind the whole society. And he who is acquainted with the controversies that have been, and that do now subsist in some churches; will, perhaps, think the sermon unexceptionable in this point, where a society is capable of existing as two distinct societies."

"I would now, Sir, point you to these particular passages in your sermon. "This is therefore what may be properly enquired into—whether they (i. e. a society seeking a minister to settle with them) are of *one mind* with respect to religion itself, and the character of the man whom they would have to preach to them the religion of the gospel. For if they can't agree in this (in these two points, I suppose) they had better *part asunder*," &c.

Will you now, be so good as to let me and others know, what you mean by these expressions? Do you mean that a society must be exactly of the same mind, in all points, respecting both the doctrines of religion, and the character of a candidate, in order to their uniting
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in calling and settling a minister ; and that if they are not, it is better for them to part asunder ? Or, do you mean that they must be agreed only in certain particular things, respecting these subjects ; and that they ought to bear with one another and continue united, though under some differences of opinion ? If this last is your meaning, ought you not (when giving advice to the people, and laying down rules for their conduct) ought you not to have informed them that this was really what you meant, and to have inculcated upon them a forbearing and charitable temper ?

If the first of these was your meaning, which, by your language, seems to be most probable, it appears to me, Sir, you have most unhappily laid a foundation here, for endless and universal divisions in christian societies. For, how few are they in any society, who are perfectly of the same mind, in every particular ? And if the least difference in sentiment ought to make a division, how must societies be crumbled into pieces ? How must the charitable communion of christians be broken and destroyed ? Must not almost every man stand by himself, and be obliged to have communion only with his own heart ?

And I am heartily sorry, that your note, which seems to be designed as some excuse, or vindication of yourself, in what might be excepted against in this part of your sermon, is so very ill calculated to mend the matter. You say, in reference to what you had offered in your sermon, " this is not designed to encourage—to give the least countenance to, the separations which are now so common in this land." But how strange is this, Sir, Have not most of these separations been pleaded for, and gone into, upon this very ground ? viz. disagreement in churches, as to the doctrines of religion, or as to the characters of ministers ? The church, or the minister was supposed not to be right in all points:—These separating people found fault with one, or both, and therefore went off. And this is the very foundation you here lay for separations ; and yet say you have
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no design to encourage—to give the least countenance to them. Indeed, I scarcely know what you could have said, more directly to countenance and encourage them, whether you designed it or not.

You add. “The author knows too much of the weakness and wickedness of some of them to mean any such thing.” Here, I doubt not, you had particularly, though not solely, in your eye, the separation in the west parish of Rowley: This, to be sure, must be weak and wicked. But is not even this, Sir, upon the same bottom,—disagreement in opinion (at least supposed) either as to religion itself, or the character of the minister? If your separating people own your society to be, in all points, right in the faith; and the minister to be, in all points, exactly right too, and yet divide and separate from you, I will acknowledge their separation is distinguishingly weak and wicked.

You say again, referring to your advice in your sermon, “Neither is it meant to suppose, there is occasion for such a disunion in this church, or to encourage it.” But really, I believe, there is occasion for it; not only in that church, but in most of the churches through the land, upon the plan you have laid down; and whether you meant to encourage it or not, it was thought to do so, by not a few; who on that account, were grieved at that part of your advice, in their critical situation.

“But rather (you say) it was thought, that the mention of the thing would be so alarming, as to persuade the christians there, to watch against strifes and divisions.” Alarming, indeed, Sir, it was to have this thing mentioned, in the manner in which you mentioned it. But how, I pray, was it likely to persuade them to watch against divisions? You presented to their view a foundation, upon which their dividing might not only be lawful but best; was this likely to persuade them to watch against divisions? was it not directly calculated to encourage their parting asunder; and even upon small differences in opinion? You seem to suppose, indeed,

It would persuade them to do some great matters for the sake of peace ; “ to give up every thing but their consciences—the truth, and cause of the Lord, for the sake of peace and unity.” But what do you mean here, by these things,—*conscience—the truth and cause of the Lord?* Every man looks upon his own opinion as the truth, and his conscience is, in some measure, concerned in it ; and religion, according to his notion of it, he considers as the cause of God. And are not these the very things, and commonly the only things, on the side of those who separate from our churches, that are pleaded in favor of their separation ? None acknowledge they separate out of humour,—prejudice, or from any carnal views : But they are obliged to it (they pretend) from conscience—for the sake of truth, and the cause of God. Now, let these things be excepted, which you suppose are not to be given up for the sake of peace and unity, and let the question be asked,—what would you have men give up for the sake of peace and unity ? and your honest answer, I conceive, must be, *nothing at all.*

I would not, however, be understood here, as suggesting, that men ought really to give up these things for the sake of peace and unity ; i. e. to violate their consciences ; and to renounce what they take to be the truth, and the cause of God. This would be, by far, too rich a sacrifice in the present cause. But then, I apprehend, Sir, there are such things as christian forbearance and charity, which you seem too much to have lost sight of, in the proper exercise of which, men may live, and act, and hold communion together as christians, without being, in all points, perfectly of the same mind. St. Paul, it appears to me, recommends the exercise of these graces or virtues in Rom. xiv. at the beginning, and in other places. *Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things : another who is weak eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not ; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth : for God hath received him, &c.*

And, indeed, if all who do not think and believe just alike, are to divide and separate, this must introduce a greater scene of wild confusion in the churches, than we have hitherto seen, and the little peace still among us must intirely forsake this unhappy land.

You go on to say " Yet when truth—necessary truth—the proper means of conversion and edification, are what is contended for, this is too tender a case to be betetermined by a majority of votes, so as to bind the whole society." Here, I presume, you ought to have said, what is *truth—necessary truth*, &c. For, as you implicitly declare that christians being of different opinions, and so contending about these matters, is a just foundation for their separating from one another; and leave every man to determine for himself, what is *truth—necessary truth*, &c. You here open a door for, and encourage as many separations, as there are different opinions, as to these things. No doubt, there are particular truths of such a nature and importance, and men may differ so widely in their opinions about them, as that it may be lawful and best for them to part asunder:—But the question is—what are these particular truths? and what are these differing opinions? Every truth, it may be supposed, is not of this nature and importance; nor every difference of opinion, and controversy, even about the most important truths.

You add, 'tis true, " And he who is acquainted with the controversies that have been, and that do now subsist in some churches; will, perhaps, think the sermon unexceptionable in this point, where a society is capable of existing as two distinct societies." I dare say, Sir, you did not mean to include here, the controversy, or separation in the west of *Rowley*, what others soever you might have in view. A separation there must, surely, be weak and wicked, and ought not to be encouraged by any sermon. But have there been no truths contended for there? have there been none in dispute, which have been thought by some to be necessary truths, &c.

But

But who, Sir, can judge whether your sermon is unexceptionable as to any particular controversies, in any churches, unless you would represent exactly the nature and circumstances of such controversies? In some churches, or societies, you here suggest that a separation is lawful, on account of subsisting controversies; and seem to allow your sermon was designed to encourage this, supposing a society capable of existing as two distinct societies. I do not know how large and wealthy your own society is, nor therefore whether a separation can be lawful there or not; but imagine, you yourself look upon it too small and weak. And when this is the case, as to others;—when a society is not capable of existing as two distinct societies, and yet there is a controversy in it about supposed truths; yea, necessary truths, what, Sir, must be done? May truth,—necessary truth, be given up in such cases, for the sake of peace and unity? Is not this altering the state of the question, and running off from your point, by making the numbers and wealth of a society, rather than any controversy about truth, the ground and reason of a separation? Had you set out upon this foundation, at first, and argued upon it, your sermon, I apprehend, must have been much more unexceptionable than it is at present.

But I will trespass no longer on your patience. If what I have offered shall be thought worthy of your notice, and you shall think proper more fully to explain yourself, as to this part of your performance, I doubt not, you will gratify many, as, I assure you, you will in particular,

Rev. Sir,

Your's, as before,

J. Tucker.

The first question is whether your position is an
 exception, as to any particular controversy, in any
 church, unless you would represent exactly the same
 and circumstances of both controversies. In some
 churches or societies, you have judged that a separation
 is better on account of the great controversy; and I want
 to show that reason was the best to encourage this
 important society capable of doing a two-fold
 work. I do not know how you will justify your own
 action. Now, however, after a separation can be law-
 ful in some cases; but now you cannot look upon it
 as a small and weak. And when this is the case, as to
 others;—when a society is separated, it is as two
 distinct societies, and yet there is a community in it
 as to the same things; and therefore, in a what you
 must be done? But now,—necessarily, must be given
 up in each case, for the sake of peace and unity? Is the
 church divided? Is there of the question, and finally, of
 your own part, for seeking a separation, and what of
 a society, to show that any community remains, and the
 ground and basis of a separation? And you cannot
 avoid this separation, at first, and second, upon it,
 your former, I apprehend, must have been much more
 a separation, than it is at present.

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